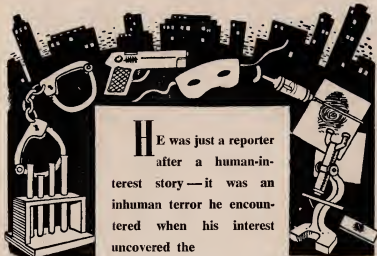


KILLER BY NIGHT





HE was just a reporter after a human-interest story—it was an inhuman terror he encountered when his interest uncovered the

KILLER BY NIGHT

by Paul Voldez

IT came from somewhere outside the house, from the depths of the night. Starting from a low-pitched whine it rose to a high-pitched crescendo. It held a sobbing, hideous note for what seemed an interminable time, then gradually faded away. The warning of death. Death close at hand; four-footed death stalking through the trees, crawling flat-bellied through the undergrowth, merging with the shadows. The howl of the wolf before the kill. When the sound had died and the echoes throbbed away to nothing,

the silence seemed even worse. A lurking, brooding quiet, the final prelude to the symphony of death by hot breath and fanged jaws ...

Later, a long time later, she sat alone in her room. She looked despairingly at her pale reflection in the mirror and tried to grasp firm hold on the last remnants of her sanity. Is it me? The question burned through her brain, seemingly burned in red-hot letters. She pressed the hot palms of her hands to her forehead and tried desperately to think.

There were so many blank spots in her memory. So many nightmarish periods of incomplete memory. What had she done earlier in the evening? The clock showed three o'clock in the morning. She remembered coming to her room to go to bed. That had been at ten o'clock. Shortly after that, came that fearful howling somewhere outside? Was it outside? Or—had it come from her own throat, or the throat of—her mind refused to face the question.

She looked down at the page of the open dictionary on the dressing-table in front of her, and the words seemed to leap from the page:

Werewolf. Literally a human wolf. A human transformed either for a time or periodically into a wolf; acquiring at the same time all the appetites of a wolf in addition to his own, especially a taste for human flesh. Sometimes a human by day and a wolf by night.

With a sudden movement, she

pushed the book from the table and it thumped to the floor to lie there in a jumbled heap of crushed pages. She looked searchingly into the mirror, seeing the smooth soft flesh of her cheeks, and the redness of her lips. She parted her lips slowly and studied the small, even white teeth. Was it possible? Did those teeth turn yellow and grow larger, sharpening into fangs? Did those smooth cheeks sprout fur, and the eyes become bloodshot?

She didn't know how long she sat in front of the mirror. It was only when the first pale light of dawn was smearing the room, that she regained enough courage to go to bed. Both her body and brain cried out with tiredness, but she didn't sleep.

There was a killer at large—a killer who killed like a mad dog. You couldn't blame the police for searching for a dog—a dog with the cunning of a mad man—or woman!! But is there any such animal.

CHAPTER I

Mad Dog

HARMAN'S secretary wasn't a bad-looking girl, not bad at all. She had curves in all the right places and the sweater and tight skirt she was wearing showed them off to perfection, you couldn't have missed them even if you tried—I didn't try. "Hullo, Mr. Allison," she smiled. "Will you go right in, Mr. Harman is waiting for you."

"Thanks," I said. I walked past her desk and through the door with MANAGING EDITOR stencilled on the glass panel.

Joe Harman got up and pumped my hand a few times, then sat me in a comfortable chair and gave me a cigarette. "Good to see you again, Mike," he said. "What are you doing in London?"

"I don't really know," I confessed. "Looking for a story with an angle, you know—something that will fit my peculiar style."

"That was a hell of a good feature of yours on the Ice-pick murders!" Joe said. "Even the Fleet Street boys said a lot of nice things about it!"

"Thanks, Joe," I took a drag on the cigarette and wondered how the English ever manage to smoke their cigarettes. It reminded me to check on my supply of Chesterfields.

Joe looked as if he was trying to think of something to say. I thought I'd help him out. "Don't let me be a nuisance, Joe," I told him. "I'll just browse around the files and keep my eyes open to see if there's anything that might make something."

"Treat the place as if you own it, Mike," he said with a wave of his hand. "Anything we can do to help, just let me know."

"Fine," I said, "fine."

I'd better explain about that. I guess it sounds like a reporter's dream-world. But it's a peculiar organisation. "Dynamite" first hit the American slick magazine market two years ago. For the last year, it has had a steady home circulation of two million, selling at fifty cents a copy, and overseas circulation of something over five million. "Dynamite" lives up to its title. We aren't scared to blow up anything. Political, or even international scandals; we broke a foreign prime minister once; murder cases, the dope racket, police corruption, armament scandals—we've had a crack at them all. We've fought million-dollar lawsuits—and won them. And all the time, the circulation kept on building up. With the circulation going up, of course, the advertising came in, and the magazine has been sitting pretty. So, as a feature-writer, and a pretty good one, though I say it myself, I'm given complete freedom and a large expense account, to do what I like. But I must turn in four, eight-thousand word features a year, and brother! They have to be good!

It's a tough racket. Usually the big stuff is well covered by the newspaper boys when it breaks, and the story's

gone before we can get near it. The only chance we have, is to find a story that's taking shape and get onto it before it breaks. We get a tip-off now and then which helps, and sometimes, snooping around on your own, you trip over something that no one else has seen. After my last feature on the ice-pick murders in Chicago, the boss had suggested I get out of the States for a while. There had been some high-grade racketeering behind the actual murders, and a lot of people outside prison bars considered by name stank. The boss thought I ought to take a trip for the sake of my health—to keep on living, as he so tactfully put it. So here I was, in London, looking for the fourth feature of the year, with Joe Hamman trying to be helpful.

It took me a week to organise the girls who did the Press-clippings into not giving me all the front-page stories, but the odd little paragraphs tucked away on the back pages, especially the back pages of the local newspapers. On the big dailies, they follow up all that stuff, anyway. Then for another week, I sat in an office and read thousands of paragraphs about church fetes, local prize-winning pigs and cows, and such fascinating revelations as Mr. John Smith would shortly marry Miss Joan Brown. At the end of the week I was getting desperate. Sure, there was a hell of a lot happening in England, but it was front-page stuff. In the small towns and villages, from what I could see of it, people just got born, grew up and died, all from natural causes.

I was well into the second week when I saw something that just might be interesting. It was a clipping from a local Yorkshire weekly paper. It went something like this:

**LOSS OF SHEEP CONTINUES.
VALUABLE FLOCKS BEING
DEPLETED BY SAVAGE DOG.**

Mr. Jim Blakey is the fourth farmer in the district to lose sheep

through the savaging of an unknown dog. Yesterday, while tending to his flock, he discovered three sheep with their throats torn out. According to Mr. Blakey, the wounds were so great, that they must have been caused by a dog of unusual size. As has been reported in previous issues, other local farmers have suffered similar losses. The deaths are attributed to a rogue sheep-dog and if anyone should see a dog that might possibly be the one concerned, they are asked to contact Sergeant Wilkes at the local police-station. Farmers feel strongly about the wanton destruction and are talking of organising a shooting-party to search the dog out and dispose of it for once and all.

Not particularly exciting, but I thought if there was enough guts in it, and they did catch the dog, I might be able to whip something out of it along the lines of the "lone wolf" idea. I sat in the chair and let my thoughts ramble on. It didn't make a bad picture. This normal quiet, intelligent sheep-dog going wild and hunting on its own until it, in turn, meets its death at the hands of the humans it once served so well. It was better than sitting on my posterior in an office, anyway.

I told Joe Harman that I was going up to Yorkshire and I didn't know how long I'd be away, but I'd contact him from time to time.

"On to something, Mike?" he asked with his nose twitching.

"Probably not, Joe," I said. "But it's worth looking at, anyway." I drew a couple of hundred for expenses and went round and saw a cockney character I know, who runs a garage. He bired me a '39 Packard, which was probably an ex-embassy car, for fifty deposit and fifteen a week. I travelled by an English train once and swore I'd never do it again. If you ever wonder

about British endurance, you needn't any more. After travelling on their trains you can endure anything!

The night before I left, I had a drink in the Ritz bar, the small one that opens off Piccadilly, and bumped into Logan from the "Record." He's a lean, hawk-faced character who's always three-parts full of some form of whisky, but he's a top-line correspondent all the same. "Greetings, Mike!" he boomed, as he saw me. "What is the barrel of gunpowder doing this side of the ocean?"

"A holiday, Pete," I said. "You know—one of those things you don't have to do anything with."

"What it is to work for a gilded magazine!" he sighed. "We poor newspaper men only hear about such things. Where are you going for this holiday?"

"Yorkshire," I said without thinking, and could have bitten my tongue out after I did say it.

"Yorkshire, eh?" he said carefully. "Why the barren moors in winter, old boy?"

"The cold will give me an excuse to stay in bed all day," I said. "What will you have to drink?"

"Scotch, thanks," he said, "double."

"The exchange rate's not that good!" I told him.

The drinks came up and I had a nasty feeling that Logan was still concentrating on Yorkshire. "How have things been, Pete?" I asked him, hoping to distract him.

"Can't complain," he said. "Though the rag seems to expect ruddy miracles all the time. They're letting me sign my stuff now, which is something. Of course I haven't yet reached the exalted position of writing one feature a year and drawing a hefty salary every week!"

"Four features a year," I corrected him, "and it depends what you mean by a hefty salary!"

"Funny you should be going up to Yorkshire," he said slowly. "I'm going up there myself the day after tomorrow. Might see you around, Mike."

"You might at that," I agreed with him.

The following night I was in Yorkshire. I'd booked a room at a pub, "The Green Coachman," and it was comfortable if not exotic. They had a stable at the back, which housed the Packard, and they kept a roaring fire going in the parlour. The pub was in the centre of the village, a place called Stowe, and you wouldn't be a detective to guess that it was the place where the dog story had originated.

The night I arrived, I went straight up to bed and got up early the next morning. After quite a fair breakfast, except for the coffee, they don't know the meaning of the word in England, I went out to take a good look at Stowe. It was a typical small village, with one main street, three pubs and two churches. I'd seen it all in an hour, so I went back to the pub and got out the car, I thought a drive round the countryside might give me a better idea of the district.

Once I was clear of the village, the rolling moors stretched away on either side as far as the eye could see. Bleak-looking, even in the wintry sunlight, they reminded me of all the stories that I'd heard about people being lost on these moors. Going mad with desperation as hunger and exposure took their toll.

I tried to make a circle around Stowe, covering about twenty miles in each direction. Apart from the farms and hamlets dotted about, it was barren country with only the sheep grazing as a sign of life. It was around five in the afternoon, just getting dark, when I was on the last leg of my journey. I was around fifteen miles out of

the village and just thinking of turning back.

It was a lonely road, I hadn't seen a cottage for about the last five miles, and I was surprised to see a car drawn up at the side of the road, as I turned the bend. I stopped the Packard and got out. Someone was half-buried under the bonnet, tinkering with the engine. "Anything I can do to help?" I asked.

The body straightened up and resolved itself into a remarkably pretty girl. I felt glad I'd stopped.

"Thanks very much," she said. "Do you know anything about cars?"

"Not a thing," I said promptly. "But I could give you a lift to the nearest gas-station."

"You're an American, aren't you?" she said.

"Sure," I agreed. "But we're allies—won't you have a lift?"

"Thank you," she laughed. "I was going home when this damned contraption gave out on me! I'd be very grateful for a lift, if I'm not taking you out of your way."

"That's impossible," I told her. "I'm just driving around having a look at Yorkshire."

"The house is only another four miles down the road," she said, "and if you're having a look at the county, the house is something you don't want to miss!"

"Historical?" I asked her.

"Almost too much history," she smiled.

"Then I'm glad your car broke down!" I said.

She slid into the front seat beside me, and I started the engine, let in the clutch and we started off down the road.

"My name's Allison," I told her, "Mike Allison."

"How do you do, Mike," she said. "I'm June Staynger."

"Now we're officially introduced," I said. "Tell me more about your house."

"It's called 'The Grange,'" she said. "A very original name! But the family have lived there for the past three hundred years. It has so much history attached to it, that it practically leaks out of the walls!"

"Sounds interesting."

"What do you do, Mike?" she asked. "When you're not touring Yorkshire?"

"I breed dogs," I lied. "I've got a fairly large place in Kentucky. I'm interested in your sheep-dogs you have up here."

"You turn off a little further to the right," she said.

I swung the car round between two open wrought-iron gates and we followed a wide driveway, through neatly cut lawns with a hedge on either side, until the house came into view. It was a massive stone place, grim-looking—a typical English country home of the type that the Lords of the Manor had lived in, in days gone by. "Here we are," I said as the car stopped outside the main door.

"At least you're staying to dinner," she said. I started to make the conventional remarks but she quickly stopped them. I followed her through the front door into the wide hallway with the colossal oaken staircase that started from halfway down the hall. She led me into a small room off the hall, where a fire burned in the grate and a decanter stood on the sideboard. "Make yourself at home here for a moment, if you don't mind, Mike," she said. "Help yourself to a drink, I'll be back in a moment."

After she'd gone, I poured myself a drink, lit a cigarette and thought that this made a pleasant change from looking at the countryside. Ten minutes later I heard footsteps and a man came into the room. I could see the simi-

larity to June in his features. He was a good deal older than she was, somewhere around forty, I guessed. His face was set hard, and the smile of welcome around his lips didn't do much to soften it. "How do you do," he said, "my name's Clive Staynger. I believe we have to thank you for rescuing June."

"I just happened along," I told him.

"You'll stay to dinner anyway," he said. "Perhaps you might be interested to look over some of the house?"

We looked the house over. They even had a portrait gallery with a long line of Stayngers frowning down at us from the time of Oliver Cromwell onwards. I saw the library with its shelves of books and the huge lounge-room which had doors that opened out onto a terrace. Finally we went back to the small room and had a final drink before dinner. June rejoined us, and the low-cut evening gown accentuated the full roundness of her curves.

In the dining-room we were joined by another man. This guy was obviously well into his fifties. A typical English character. Red cheeks, a military moustache, thick black hair streaked with grey and brushed back severely from his forehead. A clipped accent and a very bluff manner. Clive introduced me. "Major Danning," he said, "I'd like you to meet Mike Allison, he rescued June when the car broke down."

"Good show!" Danning said heartily. "How d'you do, Allison."

"Hi," I said.

Dinner was served by a decrepid-looking manservant and wasn't really very exciting. June left us at the coffee stage, and Clive passed the port. I lit a cigarette and Danning and Clive lit cigars.

"Pretty quiet sort of place you've landed in," Clive said to me.

"Nothing much ever happens up here."

"I don't know," I said. "Wasn't I reading something about a mad dog creating havoc among the sheep?"

"There was something about that," Clive wrinkled his forehead. "I heard Joe Wilkes saying something about it—he's the local sergeant of police."

"Probably a sheep-dog turned," Danning shook his head slowly. "Poor thing that. Always a pity to have to shoot a good dog!"

"They'll have to catch him first, won't they?" I asked.

"They'll catch him all right," Danning looked at me blankly. "Someone will see him soon enough."

"I wouldn't mind taking the dogs out after him," Clive said. "Be some sport!"

"Your cocker spaniels mightn't think so," Danning said soberly. "A mad dog will fight anything."

"Maybe," Clive was non-committal. "But if it turns up anywhere around here I might try it all the same."

After that the conversation drifted to other topics and then we left the table and rejoined June in the lounge-room. Clive was very interested in my mythical kennels which made things a little difficult, but I lied my way out of it fairly successfully. I left about ten o'clock and June walked outside with me to the car.

"Many thanks for a pleasant evening," I said.

"You must come again," she smiled at me. "I mean that. Give me a ring when you'd like to come out. You'll find the number in the book."

"I'll do that," I told her. She went inside and I drove away down the drive.

It was a brilliant moonlight night and I stopped the car about a hundred yards down the drive to look back at the house. It looked really beautiful

in the moonlight. I noticed a window lit in the top storey. The blinds weren't drawn and I watched it idly with the sort of curiosity that you never admit you have to other people. After a little while, a woman's figure appeared at the window and looked out. I thought it was odd. June couldn't have got up there that quickly and they hadn't mentioned anyone else being in the house. After a few minutes the woman disappeared inside the room and then the light went out. I started the motor again and started on my way back to the pub.

About halfway back to Stowe, I stopped the car again and had a cigarette. It was a beautifully clear night, crisp with a heavy frost on the ground, and even if the editorial staff of "Dynamite" do regard me as a tough guy, I've got my soft spots, and scenic beauty is one of them. On either side of the road was rolling moorland stretching away to the distance. It was perfectly quiet, the match I struck to the cigarette sounded like a shot.

When I had a couple of puffs left in the Chesterfield, I heard it. Away in the distance behind me. The baying of a dog, it sounded more like a wolf in the stillness of the night. It was almost an uncanny sound, sending cold ripples up and down my spine. I heard it again, louder this time, sounding as if the dog was moving in my direction. It was absurd, of course, even if it was, it must have still been miles away. But I must admit I didn't like it. I tossed the stub of the cigarette out of the window and started the motor. When I was doing a steady fifty along the road, I felt better. If that was the mad dog I'd heard, I'd lost any sympathy I might have had for it. The sooner someone shot it, the better!

CHAPTER II

Dr. Vaseikov's Theory

I SLEPT in the next morning and didn't get up until half-past ten. The landlord's wife had sent me a breakfast tray, so I had no need to hurry. By the time I was bathed, shaved and dressed, it was an hour later and the bars downstairs would be open. I went down and into the Saloon bar.

The barmaid set up a double scotch for me and I'd just added the soda when a plaintive voice from behind me said: "Enjoying the holiday, Mike?" I turned round and saw Pete Logan standing behind me. He was wearing a heavy overcoat and snap-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes, and he looked tired.

"Sure," I said. "I suppose this means I have to buy you another drink?"

"Double, thanks," he pulled off his gloves and rubbed his hands together. "It's a cold morning!"

"Yes, indeed," I squirted soda for him until he called a halt.

"What brings you here, Pete?"

"You haven't seen the morning papers, I suppose?" he asked in a heavily sarcastic voice.

"You're right," I told him. "I haven't."

"Really?" he looked surprised. "Come over to a table and I'll tell you about it."

We took our drinks over to a table in the corner and then he showed me a copy of that morning's "Record." There was a screaming banner headline: MUTILATED CORPSE FOUND ON LONELY YORKSHIRE MOOR. I read on. The corpse had been found early in the morning by a local farmer. The dead man was one, Tom Bligh, a local breeder of dogs. The

body had the throat torn out. There were fang marks over the face as well. I shivered as I read it, remembering the howling I had heard the night before. The story of the dead sheep and the belief that a mad dog was loose in the neighbourhood, was repeated. The body had been found about fifteen miles from Stowe, and, as near as I could calculate, about ten miles away from the Stayngers' house. That must have been the dog I heard, all right!

Pete Logan looked at me attentively as I put the paper down.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"Pretty gruesome business," I said.

He looked at me fixedly: "Come clean, Mike," he said, "what did you really come up to Yorkshire for?"

"You know the set-up with 'Dynamite,'" I said, there was no point in stalling him now, all the papers would be on to it in any case. "I've got to turn in so many features a year. I always go after the odd-looking paragraphs. This dog story, with the sheep being killed and so on, looked like it might make something. But I haven't found out a thing!"

"I wish I could believe you, Mike," Logan said. He looked really worried. "It sounds all right, but you're smart enough to make it sound that way."

"O.K., my friend," I said. "Have it your way. What are you doing up here, anyway?"

"I'm after a story, Mike," he said tensely. "I was after a story when I met you in London the other night. I was born not far from here. Tom Bligh was a friend of mine!"

"Well," I felt lost for words. "I'm sorry, Pete. I didn't realise . . ."

"Skip it, Mike," he said. "You couldn't know. But that gives me a personal interest in the thing, you see."

"Sure," I agreed with him.

We sat in silence for a while. Pete fiddling with his glass, obviously trying to say something. He got it out at last: "Mike," he said diffidently. "I know that you're top-line in your own field. But this thing means so much to me, that I've got to crack it on my own. I owe that to Tom!"

"Wait a minute!" I said. "There's nothing to crack, Pete! It's only a case of finding a mad dog and shooting it. The police will probably do that. I'm quite happy to pool any knowledge I get, but at the moment I haven't got anything!"

"I have," he said tensely. "And I'm not pooling it, Mike! I'm warning you, this thing's dangerous. Damned dangerous! With your flair for getting on the inside, you might find out too much, Mike. It won't be healthy! I'm asking you now, to leave it alone. Go back to London and forget the whole thing! I was born here, I know something about the district! I can look after myself! What do you say?"

"I think you're nuts!" I told him.

He got to his feet slowly and pulled on his gloves. "I'm sorry if I bored you," he said stiffly. "It's your funeral, Mike, and if you stick your nose in, it probably will be your funeral!" Then he marched out of the bar.

I got myself another drink after Logan had gone and thought that I always seemed to be buying him a drink without getting one in return. I wondered what it all added up to? Just a gag to try and put me off the story? Somehow, I doubted it. Logan had seemed too sincere, and he must have known that a spiel of that kind would make

me all the more eager to get my nose on to the story. It didn't make sense.

The bar was crowded that morning. All the locals were in, talking about the tragedy in shocked tones. I wasn't included in the conversation, of course, being a stranger, but I overheard quite a lot of it. Apparently Tom Bligh had been well liked in the neighbourhood. The village was full of policemen, I heard, and there was serious talk of organising a full-scale hunt for the mad dog.

I had lunch on my own in the back parlour, and when I was drinking the coffee with a brave smile, a telegraph-boy came in and handed me a wire. I tore it open and saw it was from Joe Harman.

HOW DO YOU DO IT STOP
YOU MUST BE A HUMAN
BLOODHOUND STOP AM SEND-
ING HELP IN SHAPE OF CHAR-
ACTER NAMED DOCTOR VASEI-
KOV STOP HE HAS UNUSUAL
THEORY STOP MAY HELP FEAT-
URE STOP BEST WISHES HAR-
MAN STOP.

I cursed Joe under my breath. He ought to have thought a little before he sent the wire. Now everybody in the village would know I was a newspaper man, or so near to it that it didn't matter. Joe ought to know better than me, what village post-offices are like! But there was nothing I could do about it: then, it was too late, the damage was done.

I strolled round the village during the afternoon and noticed that there was quite a lot of activity inside the police-station. I wondered whether they were going to organise a shooting-party, I didn't want to miss out on it, if they were. I got back to the pub about five and found the Stayngers' number in the phone book.

Clive answered the phone. I asked could I speak to June, and told him

who I was. He sounded quite friendly and went off to find her. A few seconds later her voice came over the phone: "Yes, Mike?"

"What are you doing to-night?" I asked her.

"Nothing," she said. "Would you like to come over?"

"I was thinking we might go out someplace," I said. "If there is any place to go out to!"

She laughed, it was a nice sound: "For a wild night out, you can either go to the pictures in Stowe," she told me, "or drive over to Searbourne, that's the nearest town, but it's forty miles away!"

"Searbourne it is," I said. "I'll pick you up around seven, how will that be?"

"Fine!" she said. I almost purred as I put the phone down.

Promptly at seven I parked the Packard outside the door, but before I could step out of the car, she was out of the front door and walking round to the other side of the car. She got in beside me and I let in the clutch.

"I'm honoured!" she said, as we went down the drive. "Being taken out by the great Mike Allison of the 'Dynamite' is something to shout about!"

"Who told you that?" I asked her.

"It's common knowledge in the village!" she laughed. "You should know you can't keep a secret in a small place like Stowe!"

"I guess not!" I sighed. "Accept my apologies for the dog-breeding story. I was really having a holiday."

"Why the past tense?" she asked.

"With this mad dog running around," I said, "I couldn't stop going back to work, even if I tried!"

She shuddered: "That was a horrible thing! I knew Tom, of course. I can't bear to think of it!"

"Well, don't," I said. "Tell me how to get to Searbourne."

We made Searbourne all right, and a pleasant change it was to be back in a town, even if it wasn't a very big one. We had dinner then did a mild pub-crawl until they were all shut. Then we drove home. I didn't drive fast, I always play it safe when I'm driving with one hand, and June didn't object to my arm around her waist.

"All Americans are supposed to be fast workers, aren't they?" she asked me.

"I wouldn't know," I said. "Down in Kansas, where I come from, in all the co-education schools, they tie the little boys' hands behind their backs from the age of four onwards!"

"I bet!" she said with emphasis.

Halfway back, I noticed a side-road that ran off beside a river-bank. "It's pretty down there in the moonlight," June said softly. "Let's take a look." I turned off the main road and cut the engine, letting the car run to a halt. Like she said, it was pretty. But I didn't really have much time to look at it. Almost as soon as we stopped, she was in my arms, and who am I to insult a woman by not looking into her eyes when I kiss her?

We left there maybe an hour later, and I drove her home. She refused to let me get out of the car, gave me a swift peck on the cheek, told me to ring her in the morning, and disappeared into the house. I shrugged my shoulders and drove on to the village. I had the key the landlord had given me, and I let myself in the back door, seeing the time was just gone one o'clock in the morning. I was tiptoeing past the back parlour when I saw the door was open and the light on. Somebody was sitting in there with a bottle and two glasses in front of him. The sight of that bottle made me feel

thirsty. I caught sight of a guy sitting behind the table. A heavily-built character with a beard. He looked up and the light reflected from his massive domed forehead. "I have been waiting for you Mr. Allison," he said in a guttural voice, "won't you join me in a drink?"

"Thanks very much," I said, walking into the room. "You would be Doctor Vaseikov."

"Quite correct," he nodded slowly. "I arrived about nine o'clock this evening."

"Sorry I wasn't here to meet you," I sat down in a chair opposite him and noticed with approval that the bottle contained good Scotch.

He poured me a drink and I squirted soda into it. "Mr. Harman explained to me what had happened here," he said. "Fortunately I am an authority upon the subject, and he considered that I should be able to help you quite a lot!"

"Joe is too kind," I told him. I wondered if even the Scotch was enough compensation for putting up with this character. He struck me like a wart—a permanent blot on the landscape!

"This howling dog is fascinating," he murmured. "Unique! The first case of its kind in the British Isles."

"Mad dogs aren't that rare," I objected.

"I am not referring to mad dogs," he said patiently. "I am referring to the lycanthrope who must dwell unsuspected, among the villagers." He looked up and saw my blank look. "The term is perhaps unknown to you?" I nodded. "Lycanthropy is the practice of assuming the form of an animal by a human," he explained. "Of if you prefer an old-fashioned term, a were-wolf, in this particular case."

Oh, no! I thought. Why doesn't Joe Harman have the screwballs locked up

instead of sending them up to Yorkshire to bother me! He must have seen the look on my face. "I am not crazed," he smiled, "how do you Americans put it—a screwball?"

"How does your theory work?" I asked him, for the sake of saying something.

He leaned forward, his elbows on the table, balancing the tips of his fingers together. "Please, tell me first what you know of the happenings down here."

"O.K.," I shrugged my shoulders, I had nothing to lose but time, and drinking time is never lost, only spent. I told him what had happened in London, when I first read the clippings and thought there might be a story behind it. How the night before I had heard the dog howling, and how I'd heard the locals discussing the death this morning.

He nodded as I finished: "To my mind there is one significant thing," he said solemnly. "Who has ever seen this mad dog?"

I thought hard, "I can't remember having heard or read about any guy that's actually seen it," I said.

"Aha!" he wagged his forefinger at me. "That is highly interesting. You yourself heard this dog howling. No doubt many others heard it as well. But no one has seen it. Consider, if it was a sheep-dog that had the madness, surely someone would have seen it before now? Is it possible, even in isolated country like this, for a marauding dog to go unseen? No. Of course it isn't!"

"Are you seriously trying to tell me that somebody who lives in the neighbourhood changes into a sort of wolf and goes out killing sheep—and now a man?" I asked him.

"Most certainly!" he said, nodding his head vigorously. "There is no other explanation! Firstly, in its beginnings, it

is satisfied with animals. Then it progresses another stage and kills a man. It will not stop there, there will be more killings and then finally it will turn on those it loves, its own family, wife, children, mother or father as the case may be."

I lit a cigarette: "You paint a pretty picture!" I said.

"I know it is not pretty!" he agreed. "But, unfortunately, I think it is the truth! It is the logical explanation. You cannot find the dog by day, why? Because it does not exist in the daytime! But then it is a normal human being again. Probably not thinking for a moment that he or she has anything to do with the killings. At the worst, only a few vague memories which are put down to nightmares!"

I took a deep draw on my cigarette. "I'll grant you that it is an explanation," I said. "But you don't really

believe in the existence of such things as werewolves?"

"Not in the classical form," he said slowly. "I do not imagine that a human being can assume the characteristics of a wolf in their physical form, but mentally, that is a different matter!"

"You think a man could imagine himself to be a wolf and then act like one?"

"Assuredly!" Vaseikov emptied his glass and tilted the bottle to replenish it. "Why not? A state of mental unbalance where a man thinks of himself at certain times, as an animal? And acts like one?"

"That's all very well," I objected. "But why attack other humans and particularly the ones dear to him?"

"Because in his state of madness, he pictures himself as the werewolf of fable," Vaseikov said quietly. "It is not pretty, my friend, but can you think of any other explanation?"

CHAPTER III

Danning Gives A Warning

WHAT with Vaseikov and the Scotch, my head didn't feel too good the next morning. I almost crawled down the stairs to breakfast and couldn't look any food in the face. But I finally managed to eat a piece of dry toast and I drank three cups of coffee. I went out directly afterwards. I didn't want to bump into the Doctor if I could help it. I thought there was no point in trying to conceal I was a journalist now, if everyone in the village knew.

I went into the local police-station and saw the desk-sergeant. He was a muscular guy, weighing somewhere around two hundred pounds, if I was any judge, and he had a look of long-suffering patience. I introduced myself and asked him what he'd got in the

way of information. He thought for a moment then went into a back room and came back a few seconds later with an Inspector. "This is Inspector Wright," he said with a broad accent. "He can tell you better than me."

"Thanks," I said. "My name's Mike Allison, Inspector," I told the grey-haired man with the black moustache. "From 'Dynamite,' the American magazine, maybe you've heard of it?"

He smiled, showing a row of even teeth. "I've heard of you as well, Mr. Allison," he said. "The Ice-Pick Murders. Quite a brilliant piece of reporting, if I may say so."

"That's very nice of you," I said. "I wonder if you have any angles on this dog killing, you could let me have?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," he said. He pulled a pipe out of his pocket and began to plug tobacco into it slowly. "We haven't made much progress as yet. We thought it should be a comparatively simple process to find the dog, but it hasn't turned out that way at all. Of course, it's only a matter of time, the main difficulty is the fact that no one's actually seen the dog!"

I had an uncomfortable memory of Vaseikov's words of the night before. "That's about all there is to it, at the moment?" I asked him.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm afraid it is. I'd like to be able to tell you more. When we know something more, of course I'll be only too pleased."

"You're sure it is a dog?" I asked him.

He looked at me sharply, then concentrated on lighting his pipe for a moment. "No," he said, puffing away. "I'm not at all sure it's a dog. But that's not for the record." He threw the burnt match away and looked at me steadily. "What are you on to?" he asked.

"What prompted that question?"

"I'm not on to anything," I said, feeling sorry I'd opened my big mouth. "But I just wondered. I couldn't quite see a sheep-dog, mad or otherwise, killing a man like that!"

"Neither can I," Inspector Wright said. "But I can't think of any alternative!"

I went back to the pub and the bar was open by the time I reached it. I had a drink and was thinking about a second, when Pete Logan came up beside me. "Well!" I said. "You're just in time to buy me a drink!"

"You didn't take my advice and go back to London?" he asked.

"No," I agreed. "I didn't."

"What have you found out, Mike?" he asked, tensely.

"Not a thing!" I assured him. "Me and the police are getting no place fast!"

"The police!" he laughed mirthlessly. "They couldn't see anything unless it was stuck under their nose!"

"There's an interesting character by the name of Vaseikov," I said, "he's got a theory about werewolves." I wasn't looking at Logan when I spoke. There seemed to be a long silence after I'd finished. I looked round and saw Logan with his face white and his eyes glassy. "What did you say!" he whispered.

"Werewolves," I repeated. "You know—things that go howl in the night."

"What makes him think that?"

"His prime reason for the deduction is the fact that no one has as yet seen the dog," I said. "Therefore, according to the Doctor the thing is a lycan . . . something. Which means, if your education isn't any better than mine, a human that firmly believes it becomes a wolf during some certain periods of insanity!"

He drained his glass in one gulp and said. "Where does this Vaseikov get his theories from?"

"You have me there," I admitted. "Why don't you go ask him?" I nodded towards the door where I saw the Doctor just entering the bar.

"Maybe I will," Logan said.

"Good! You do that thing," I told him. "I've just remembered I've got a date some place else!" I ducked away from the bar, and just before I sneaked out the door, I saw Logan stop Vaseikov and start speaking to him. I felt thankful that I'd dodged the Doctor, the one session the night before had been enough!

I went up to my room for some cigarettes and found someone waiting for me there. "Frightfully sorry to hust in and all that," Danning said. "Matter of

fact, old boy, I wanted to speak to you on a private matter. Thought the best thing to do was to wait in your room, I hope you don't mind?"

"I'm easy," I said. I took a pack of Chesterfields out of the drawer and offered him one. He shook his head with a faint shudder, so I lit one and then sat down on the bed. "What's on your mind?" I asked him.

"Rather delicate thing to talk about," he muttered. "Hope you won't be offended, old boy."

"If I knew what the hell you were talking about, I could probably answer that one," I was beginning to feel impatient.

"Well, you took June out last night," he said. "Matter of fact, I'm...well, sort of engaged to her, you see."

"You're telling me to lay off?" I asked him.

"In a sort of way."

"Nuts to you, my friend!" I told him. "June can make her own mind up about that."

"It isn't quite as simple as all that," he looked at the toes of his shoes. "If it was, I wouldn't dream of approaching you. Of course you would be perfectly right in what you say. Fact of the matter is that her mother is a very sick woman—very sick. June and Clive do their best to look after her, but she doesn't seem to improve. It's a great strain on the family, I might tell you! So, naturally, if any excitement is in the offing, June is all for it. It means a slight escape from the monotony of a house where there is an invalid. If things were normal, I wouldn't worry, but the way things are I thought it only fair to tell you. June is a very highly-strung girl and her mother's illness has been playing on her nerves. Because of that she's inclined to take any man that comes along as being the only man in her life. I don't like to see her get hurt."

I noticed the cigarette was almost finished, so I lit another one from the butt-end. "You're telling me to lay off, unless I intend to propose marriage, is that it?" I asked him.

"Precisely," he looked relieved. "You have an acute perception, Mr. Allison."

"Supposing I still say nuts to you."

"Then I won't answer for the consequences!" he said stiffly.

"A rebuttal in her stage of nervous health could cause anything! I would go as far as to say that suicide wouldn't be an impossibility, once she discovered you were only amusing yourself with her!"

"This could be a good line on your part to get me out of the picture," I said. "I'll have to think about it, Danning."

"You have my word that it's true!" he said coldly. "I hope you won't do anything you may have cause to regret later on!" And he stalked out of my room.

I thought I was getting tired of people telling me what to do. There was Logan telling me to mind my own business and go back to London. Vaseikov telling me his theory on werewolves. Now Danning was telling me to stay out of the garden when June was around. And as far as a feature story was concerned, I was right back where I started—with nothing!

The only thing of interest was the fact that June's mother was sick. I thought that would have been the woman I had seen at the window the other night. I wondered how much of the truth Danning had told me. Anyway, I asked myself, what are my intentions? It wasn't an easy question to answer. Would I ask June Stayneger to marry me? Under certain circumstances I might.

I left the pub and went down to the post office and made a trunk-call

to the London office. When I finally got Joe Harman on the line, I gave him a large chunk of my mind.

"Wait a minute, Mike!" he protested. "This chap Vaseikov is an expert in his own field!"

"Don't tell me he really is a doctor!" I said.

Joe yelled: "He's one of the foremost psychiatrists in the world!"

"I thought he had quite an angle there! Help you with your feature."

"Yeah," I said bitterly. "But sometime soon, some guy's going to turn up with the dog that's caused all the trouble and then where are we going to be?"

"I'm going to be still in London," Harman said with a snigger.

"Where will you be?"

"Funny man!" I said bitterly. "Where did you drag up this character, Vaseikov?"

"He came into the office," Joe said. "Told me he knew all the answers and wanted to cover it for us. Told me our magazine was the only one with guts enough to print the truth! I told him we already had one of our best correspondents covering it for us, but he seemed to know what he was talking about, so I suggested he come up to you and give you a hand."

"You mean he's on the payroll?" I bleated.

"Sure," Harman said. "You wouldn't expect him to do it for the fun of the thing?"

"But he's a screwball!"

"I don't think so," Joe said seriously. "He's got a reputation in these things. You'd be surprised!"

"You're telling me!" I said as I put the receiver down.

When I left the post-office I thought I might do something for a change. Find out something about Tom Bligh,

the man who was killed. Back at the pub, I talked to the landlord about him. He was a decent sort of man, according to the landlord. Tom Bligh had always kept himself to himself, but he was respected as a man of his word. He'd bred Alsations, peculiarly enough, not sheep-dogs. Most of his dogs were sold outside the locality.

"Wouldn't it have been possible for one of his own dogs to turn on him?" I asked.

"The police thought of that," the landlord said. "But all his dogs were locked up at night. The kennels were surrounded by a high mesh-wire fence. Every dog was accounted for, still inside the fence."

"Any reason for anyone to dislike him?"

The landlord shook his head slowly: "I don't think so," he said. "No one I can think of, anyway."

So I didn't get very far.

The table was set for two at dinner that night and sure enough Vaseikov joined me at my second mouthful of soup.

"And what have you discovered today?" he asked me, beaming all over his face.

"Briefly—nothing!" I told him. "How about you? Found your lycan—whatever it is?"

"Have you seen the evening papers?" he asked me. I shook my head. With a flourish of triumph he produced a copy of the paper and handed it to me.

Plastered all over the front page was Vaseikov's theory of lycanthropy. "Is there a human werewolf in our midst?" screamed a black headline. "What are the police doing? Is there a maniac at large?" I put down the paper and glared at him. "What's the idea?"

"There was a reporter here this afternoon," he said. "He asked me my

opinion on the matter and naturally I told him."

"Naturally!" I echoed. He ignored the sarcasm in my voice.

"What does it matter?" he asked me.

"Well," I said heavily. "There's the minor point that you're employed by 'Dynamite' at the moment!"

"I'm sorry if I . . ."

"And secondly," I ignored his interruption. "If there by some fantastic chance should be any truth in your theories, it means it's as exclusive as Piccadilly Circus!"

He apologised profusely, it didn't matter much, the damage was done. I was beginning to think that my feature wouldn't come from Stowe, I'd have to start looking some place else for it. But Stowe still had its attractions—like June, for example.

When dinner was over I went up to my room. It was damned cold and I could see the snowflakes whirling outside the window. The wind was getting up, too, making the whole place shake and rattle. A good night to go to bed early and sleep late, but I had other ideas. I put on a sweater and then wrapped a scarf round my neck and got into a heavy overcoat.

I opened my brief-case and took out the .44 calibre Smith and Wesson. It's

a damn great thing, kicks like a mule when you fire it, but it would stop an elephant, let alone a mad dog. I've carried it around with me for a few years now, it gives me a comfortable feeling to have it. I checked the magazine and saw it was fully loaded, then shoved the safety-catch over and put the gun in my pocket.

The Packard took a while to warm up. When I hacked it out of the stable and onto the road, it was around nine in the evening. The snow was still coming down fairly thick and fast. I turned the heater and the radio on and pulled up the collar of my overcoat round my ears.

I had an idea I'd like to see the place where Tom Bligh had lived, and the kennels, too. The landlord had told me where to find the house, about ten miles from the village in the same direction as the "Grange," but not so far.

The radio was bleating out the second part of an opera or something, and the snow was a white curtain about fifty yards in front of me. At the back of what passes for my mind, I was beginning to get the inkling of an idea. It could be screwy, of course, but a look at Tom Bligh's place might help.

CHAPTER IV

Werewolf Strikes Again

I HAD the headlights up all the time, but about two miles from the village I had to switch the radio off and rely on my hearing to know if anything was coming from the opposite direction. The snow was really heavy now and it killed the headlights about ten feet from the honnet. I should've stayed home.

It wasn't easy following the road. I

was doing about fifteen miles an hour all the way, and what with stopping to make sure I hadn't missed the place, it took me over an hour to get there. It was sure a relief to pull up beside the door of the house and cut the motor.

It was very, very quiet. I lit a cigarette and got the torch out from the glove-box under the dash, opened the

door of the car and got out. The wind was bitterly cold against my face, and the snow swirled, half-blinding me. I ran across to the front door, tried the handle and found it opened. I switched on the torch and stepped inside.

There was no electricity in the house, so I had to rely on the torch. I picked my way cautiously down the small hallway and into the main room. All the furniture was covered in drapes, and looked as cheerful as a morgue! I stopped in front of a roll-topped desk and tried the shutter. It was locked, but it looked a flimsy type of thing. I got out my penknife and slipped the blade under the catch and levered up. The lock came away from the wood with a splintering sound, and I pushed the roller up.

Inside the desk were bundles of papers neatly clipped together, and a quarter-sized black book. I picked up the book and saw that it was a record of sales during the past year. I thumbed through it carefully, noting that Tom Bligh must have had an accountant's brain. Each transaction was meticulously noted, the name of the dog, its pedigree, the amount it fetched, the buyer, the name of the purchaser and date of delivery. I didn't find what I was looking for. I went through page after page, noting the buyer's name in each case, but none of them meant anything. But towards the end, covering the period of about four months back, a page was missing.

I tossed the book back into the desk. Somebody had been smarter than me. The police? I doubted it, if they'd considered the page at all significant they would have taken the whole book, not just torn out the page. From somewhere outside, at the back of the place, one of the Alsations began to moan softly. It cut across my nerves like a cheese-cutter.

I lit another cigarette and wondered. There was just nothing else I could do now. What I'd come for was on that page missing out of the black book and who had it now was anybody's guess. One thing for sure, I didn't know.

Outside, there was a regular symphony of Alsations. They weren't barking, I don't mind a barking dog, they were moaning and howling, it sounded like a chorus of lost souls waiting for Charon to ferry them across the Styx. The cigarette burned down between my fingers as I listened to them. I thought that maybe there was something upsetting them—a brilliant thought! It was an uncomfortable thought, it meant that I wasn't the only guy wandering around the place. The only man—or thing! I had a nasty picture of a human shape with great fangs hanging out of its mouth, stalking around outside.

I took a firm grip on the Smith and Wesson in one hand and the torch in the other. I went out into the hall again and down to the kitchen. There was a back door there that wasn't bolted. I opened it and was outside again. The snow had stopped falling and I could see one or two stars in the black canopy overhead. The blanket of snow underneath my feet deadened any sound. It was a fresh, new world. A world fraught with menace and the only sound the continual whining of the dogs. I wished I was some other place.

The kennels had heavy-mesh wire fences six feet tall, and they were closed in over the top with the same stuff. I walked round them shining the torch inside the enclosures. Most of the dogs were just howling in sympathy. Almost the last pen I looked in I saw a couple of dogs crouched in one corner, their hair bristling. One had its head thrown back and was howling at full blast. The other was snarling and snuffling at something that lay on the ground. In

the beam of the torch, I thought I saw a pair of shoes—with feet in them.

A long time later, my heart quietened down a little and I got used to the idea that the feet weren't moving. I shoved the gun back into the pocket of my overcoat and moved round to the door of the run. It had a bolt on the outside. I slid it back, opened the door and went inside the run, slowly.

The dogs came towards me, wagging their tails, friendly. I guess they were happy to see a live human. I stopped to light a Chesterfield and then moved towards the shoes. It was a man, his hat had fallen off about two feet away from him, and the snow was caked on his bare head. He was lying face down with both arms outstretched and the fingers of each hand clenched tight. There was something familiar even about his back. I knelt down beside him and gently turned him over.

When I shone the torch down on his face I nearly shrieked. There was a great gaping hole where his throat should have been, and the blood had run everywhere. The eyes were open, glazed now with rigor mortis coming on apace, but the undiluted horror was still reflected in them. I hoped I'd never look at what he had seen. I got back to my feet, thinking there was nothing I could do about it, he'd been dead for a while. I wondered what had brought Pete Logan out on a night like this. What had brought him to his death?

I went back through the house and rubbed round the desk with a handkerchief to make sure there were no fingerprints left. I thought that maybe I hadn't been very smart choosing this night to have a look at Tom Bligh's

house. I sat in the car for a few minutes before I left, trying to put together what facts I had. I knew, from the landlord of the pub, that the police had left Bligh's place alone after the first day—that was why I'd come here, I was pretty sure they wouldn't have anyone guarding the place. But now I report the finding of Logan's body and the police come out, find the broken lock on the desk, and maybe I'm in for some awkward questions. It didn't look too bright.

I choked the engine and she started on the third press of the starter button. I thought that I wouldn't report Logan's death. Whoever was looking after the dogs would find him in the morning, and it wouldn't help him or the police to report his death to-night. Why hadn't I stayed in the pub and had a quiet drink?

Sub-consciously, I started off away from the village and a quarter of an hour later, I realised that I was almost up to the "Grange." I debated with myself as the gaunt house came into view, whether I should try my luck for a drink. My wrist-watch showed a quarter after ten. It wasn't that late. I stopped the Packard at the top of the drive and told myself that if there were any lights on in the house, I'd knock at the door, if there wasn't I'd go back to the car and back to Stowe.

I walked down the drive, feeling the snow crunch under my feet. The night had cleared up very nicely. There was a pallid moon coming up over the horizon, and the snow seemed to have stopped for good. When I got up to the house, it looked like I was out of luck. There wasn't a light showing anywhere.

I was just about to start walking back down the drive, when a light suddenly shone from the top storey. It was the same window that I had seen the women in, before. It must be Mrs. Staynger's room. I remembered what Danning had said about her being a permanent invalid.

Whilst I watched I saw a woman's figure come to the window, silhouetted against the light from within the room. I watched her for a few seconds. I could only see the outline of her, of course, but I was interested—very interested. She was moving round like anyone else, I couldn't see any that remotely reminded me of an invalid.

There was a creeper covering the front of the house. An evergreen of some sort, not the perennial ivy, but something I didn't recognise. It looked tough though, its branches were thick as far up as I could see. There was no sign of life downstairs in the house. I thought I'd chance it. I swung up on to the first branch and then started to climb warily up the creeper towards the lighted window.

Maybe looking into lady's bedroom windows isn't done in the best of circles, but you have to remember that I'm primarily a journalist. "Dynamite" pays me a lot of dough to stick my nose into what strictly doesn't concern me. Surprising what you can learn from peeking into windows or through keyholes!

I finally got up level with the window and began edging my way along until I got to a point where, by craning my neck, I could see in. The room looked a typical woman's room. There was a bed at one side, a dressing table

opposite and the woman was seated in front of it. She looked to be about fifty. Her black hair was streaked with grey and her face was ravaged with some intense emotion. The lines on her forehead and cheeks were sunk deep, and the eyes had a haunted expression. She was wearing a dressing-gown over a nightdress, and her feet were tucked into felt slippers.

She didn't seem to be doing anything. She had her elbows on the dressing-table and her face was held between her hands. She looked as if she was studying her own reflection. Apart from her face and eyes, she didn't look anything else but a normal middle-aged woman. There was no sign of the invalid about her.

I could feel my shoulders beginning to ache with the strain of hanging on to the bough of the creeper. She got up suddenly from the dressing-table and walked over to the bed. There was a book lying on it and she picked it up and hurled it across the room at the mirror. It hit without breaking the glass and fell to the floor. Then she picked up a topcoat that had been lying across the bed and looked intently at the hem.

Following her gaze, I felt my blood run cold. Across the bottom of the coat was a huge bloodstain. As I watched, she dropped the coat to the floor with a gesture of despair and then started to weep. She worked herself up to a frenzy of hysteria, and then threw herself to the floor and grovelled there. It wasn't a pretty sight! And then came the worst thing of all. She suddenly lifted her head and started to howl. My memory jumped back to

the howl of the dog I heard that first night. This was identical. I heard footsteps running towards the room and didn't wait to see who it was. I climbed down the creeper as quickly and as quietly as I could. When I was back on the drive, I hurried down it, keeping to the shadow of the hedge at one side.

I got back into the car, lit a cigarette and started back to Stowe and the pub. What was it Vaseikov had said? Lycanthropy?

It was a quarter to midnight when I put the car back into the stable and then went in through the back door. The landlord was still up and I prevailed on him for a bottle of Scotch. I took it with me up to Vaseikov's room and knocked on the door. A sleepy voice answered after a while and he came and opened up.

I walked past him and plonked the Scotch down on the table.

"Pull up a chair," I told him, "here is where you start earning your money!"

"What is it all about?" he asked, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. He pulled a dressing-gown over his pyjamas and woke up a little more when his eyes hit the bottle of Scotch. He got two glasses from a small cupboard over his bed and put them down on the table. I half-filled one and drank it in a gulp, then I filled both the glasses.

"You look as if you needed that, my friend," he said.

"That," I told him, "is an understatement!"

When he was really awake, and sitting opposite me, I told him the whole story of the evening. He grinned his satisfaction when I had finished. "Sol"

He puffed out his chest. "I am vindicated! My theory was not a lot of nonsense!"

"I hate to admit it," I said, "but it sure looks as if you were right. But there's one other point as well, the last time I saw Logan alive, he was talking to you. Did he say anything very interesting?"

Vaseikov looked at me shrewdly: "I see why you are what they call an ace reporter!" he said. "You are wondering whether Logan's death was incidental, or if he was killed because he knew something?"

"You get the drift," I agreed. "But you haven't answered the question."

He started to look very crafty then and tried to change the subject. I brought him back to the question very quickly.

"I would rather not say," he said finally. I started to raise the roof and called him a lot of names, reminded him he was under contract to us and so on, but it didn't make any difference. "No," he said, determinedly. "Though I appreciate all you say, Mr. Allison, it doesn't make any difference. By to-morrow night I shall know whether my theories are correct. Please be patient until then. I don't want to be unjust to anyone. By to-morrow evening I shall know for sure. Give me until then."

And I couldn't shake him from that.

I had another drink with him, to show I hated his guts and then I went on to my room. I undressed quickly and got into bed, shivering with the raw coldness of the room. I had a last thought before I went to sleep. I wondered how I'd go as a clerk or a salesman. I was beginning to think that the life of a feature-writer was getting too tough for me.

CHAPTER V

Inspector Is Suspicious

SOMEONE knocked on my door and I pulled myself out of a warm, comfortable sleep and bellowed, "Come in." A pretty sort of a girl, who was apparently a chambermaid, walked in. I wondered why I hadn't noticed her before—I thought that maybe I was losing my grip.

"I'm terribly sorry, sir," she said.

"Don't be," I told her. "With your looks you've got nothing to be sorry about!" She blushed from the face down to where her neck disappeared under her uniform and I wondered just how far down the blush went. It was an interesting thought.

"There's a gentleman outside who says he must see you," she said. "Inspector Wright is his name."

"Tell him to come in," I told her. "And could you rustle up a tray with some toast and coffee?"

"Yes, sir," she dimpled. "It'll be a pleasure."

"What's your name," I asked her.

"Alice," she said.

"Maybe we ought to try and find a wonderland one night," I said. "Keep your evenings free, Alice."

"I'll tell the gentleman to come in," she blushed again. "And then I'll bring the tray up."

I fumbled for a pack of cigarettes and wondered what the hell Wright wanted. That was the trouble with having a guilty conscience. He came in a couple of seconds later and waved aside the cigarette I offered him. "This

is strictly business, Allison," he said curtly. "Where were you last night?"

"Here," I said. I saw the look in his eye and went on hastily. "That is, until after dinner. Then I went for a drive."

"Where to?"

"Nowhere in particular," I said. "Just around."

"In the snow?" he raised his eyebrows.

"In the snow," I agreed.

Alice came back with a tray. Hot toast and a pot of coffee and two cups. I thanked her and watched her hips as she weaved out of the door. She looked like a girl who knew her best points—or curves. "If I'm due for some third degree, Inspector," I said, "how about a cup of coffee first?"

He smiled momentarily and nodded his head. I stubbed my cigarette out and then poured the coffee. He sat down close to the bed and I stuck my teeth into some toast.

"I'll tell you where you went last night," he said evenly. "You went to Tom Bligh's house. You forced the lock on his desk and then went out to the kennels and found the body of a journalist, a man named Logan. After that you drove to the 'Grange,' left your car at the top of the drive, and walked down to the house. You arrived back here at 11.45 p.m. and got a bottle of whisky from the landlord and came upstairs."

"I know where you got the last part,"

I said. "That's easy, you've been talking to the landlord. Where do you get the rest of it?"

He took a sip of his coffee and then smiled. "It snowed last night," he said patiently. "Your car, being a Packard, is somewhat distinctive. The tyre marks showed quite plainly in the snow this morning. We followed them from Bligh's place to the 'Grange.' We saw your footprints going down the drive."

"I didn't go inside the house," I said. "There were no lights showing and I didn't like to knock them up."

"I might be prepared to believe that," Wright said. "You know, you're in serious trouble. Breaking and entering, not reporting the finding of a corpse! You've got a lot of explaining to do, Allison, and it'd better be good."

I was wondering how I could be so dumb not to think of the tyre-marks in the snow. "O.K., Inspector," I said slowly. "Here it is. I had an idea about the dogs that Bligh had sold in the last few months. It was just a hunch, I thought maybe he'd sold one to someone who lives round here. That was why I went to his place last night. I broke open the desk to have a look at his papers."

"And you found the black book with the page missing?" Wright said. "We thought of that one, too. But someone beat us to it. The page was gone when we first looked at the book."

"The dogs started howling while I was there," I said. "So I went out and had a look at them. I found Logan's body in one of the pens. There wasn't any sign of anyone else around. I thought I'd call in at the 'Grange' for a drink, but it looked as if they'd all

gone to bed, so I came back to the pub."

"Why didn't you report to us that you'd found Logan's body?"

"I was scared," I said frankly. "I'd broken into the place, and I thought it wouldn't look so good. I couldn't help Logan, and the few hours difference before someone else found the body wouldn't help you."

Wright put down his empty cup and lit a cigarette—"Perhaps you can get away with that sort of thing in the States," he said coldly, "but you can't get away with it in England!"

"I'm sorry," I said meekly.

"I notice a friend of yours, one, Vaseikov, has a theory about lycanthropy," he said suddenly.

"So he tells me," I agreed.

"Do you think it's likely?"

"Could be," I said.

He got to his feet and looked at me thoughtfully: "I'm glad you were frank with me," he said. "Otherwise we'd be on our way to the station now! I'm not going to forget it, Allison, but I'm not going to do anything about it for the present, anyway. I have a certain amount of respect for both you and the magazine that employs you. But don't do anything like this again or you'll really be in trouble!"

"Thanks, Inspector," I said. "I'll be good."

"In this case I think the old tag applies," he said as he walked towards the door. "If you can't be good—be careful! I don't think Logan remembered that."

The door shut behind him and I wondered what the hell he meant by his last remark. I was glad I hadn't

tried to be smart with him. I reckoned that Wright was one copper who wouldn't stand for any smart alec stuff.

I got up and went down to the bathroom and had a shower and a shave. I was just finishing dressing, putting on my jacket when there was a knock on the door and Alice came in to collect the tray.

"You know you said something about Wonderland," she said hesitantly.

"Sure," I agreed. "I remember."

"Would that be the new picture show at Searbourne?" she asked.

I grinned. "I guess it would be, baby," I gave her a friendly pat on the bottom. "Maybe we might go over there, to-morrow night?"

"I'd like that!" she said. "In that big car of yours, and all!"

I was waiting outside the Post Office when it opened. The trunk call didn't take long to come through, and twenty minutes later I was talking to Joe Harman. "Listen, Joe," I said. "How fast can you dig up all the dope that's available on Pete Logan and how soon can you get it up here to me?"

"I'll get the dope by midday," he said confidently. "But it would be quicker for you to fly down and collect it. Then you can read it on your way back. Wait a minute!" he was gone for maybe twenty seconds. "There's a plane leaves Manchester at eleven," he said.

"We'll get you a seat on it, and book you back on the four o'clock. How would that be?"

"I'm on my way," I told him.

I got into Manchester airport with ten minutes to spare. I left the car in

the park, and found that Joe had everything organised for me. By one o'clock I was sitting in his office.

"Come and have some lunch," he said. "The dossier will be ready for you by the time we get back."

It was. One of the boys from the office drove me out to the airport, and I caught the plane in plenty of time.

After take-off, I settled back in my chair and had a look inside the folder Joe had given me. There was all the stuff I already knew. Logan's work for the "Record" and his career as a journalist. But there was something else that was interesting. It sat me upright with a jolt.

The family tree of the Logan family was very interesting. The maiden name of Logan's mother was Staynger! Apparently his father had married the sister of the woman I had watched through the window. So Pete had been a relation of the Staynger family. No wonder he was so interested in the case. I thought that maybe that was what he had been talking about to Vaseikov the night before. His mother had died in a mental home. That forged another deep link in the chain that led directly to Mrs. Staynger. Insanity in the family. I wondered if Pete had suspected the same thing in his aunt and was trying to hush it up. That would explain his being so bitter towards me when he thought I was nosing around for a story.

I had to hand it to whoever compiled the dossier, they'd certainly been thorough. There were Press-clippings right back to his father's time. Then I came across this, clipped from the "Monitor," a daily that isn't around any

more now, but this particular clipping was dated the 17th July, 1921.

**MILLIONAIRE LEAVES FORTUNE
UNDER STRANGE
CONDITIONS**

Under the terms of his will revealed to-day by his solicitors, the late Hugh Staynger had many curious conditions imposed on the beneficiaries. All his estate is left in trust and neither his son nor his daughter can inherit the actual fortune and estates during their lifetime. After their deaths, a period of ten years must elapse, and then their surviving partners, or children will inherit the whole estate.

I traced the family tree. Lord Staynger had a son and a daughter. The daughter married a man named Logan and they had one son, Peter Logan. The son had married the woman I knew now as Mrs. Staynger, and they had two children, Clive and June.

I realised that the terms of the will became valid at the end of this year, and the surviving members of the family would inherit the bulk of the fortune. Peter Logan had been the only surviving member of his branch of the family, and there were the mother and the two children on the other side of the family.

I put the dossier down and lit a cigarette. Staring me in the face was the whole answer to everything that had happened. It made me sick to think of it! But more important than that it became a matter of vital urgency to be back in Stowe by nightfall.

"Excuse me, sir," I looked up at the smiling face of the hostess. "Would you mind putting your cigarette out?"

I gazed at her blankly for a moment. She nodded towards the illuminated sign which said, "No Smoking."

"Surely we aren't in Manchester yet?" I asked her.

"No, sir," she said in those sweet tones of inspired confidence that all good hostesses have. "Fog has suddenly closed down on half the country. We're coming down at London. I'm afraid you won't get to Manchester before tomorrow morning!"

I said something under my breath and her smile slipped about half an inch. "Sorry," I muttered.

"Not at all sir!" she said frigidly, and stomped off down the aircraft. And I slumped back in my seat and thought that even the weather was in the conspiracy!

I rang Joe from the airport, he sounded doubtful: "I can send the car all right," he said. "But if the fog's bad you'll never make it up to Manchester!"

"I've got to give it a try, Joe," I said. "Life depends on it and I'm not kidding!"

"All right," he said briskly. "I'll send young Townsend down to pick you up. He's a good man, he knows the roads and he can drive."

Some half an hour later, a guy about twenty-four or five came into the reception-hall and asked for me. I almost jumped at him, and we went out to the car. I threw my bag into the back seat and got in beside him and we started off.

"This is a nice job," he said. "It was originally a '39 Riley, but it's got a supercharged V8 engine in it. There's

practically nothing on the road to touch it!"

"Fog lights?" I asked glumly.

"Three," he said. I felt a little brighter.

For the first hour and a half we made good time. Covered eighty-two miles, which was some going. The lad could certainly drive. Then we hit the fog and slowed down to thirty and at that he was taking a hell of a risk.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Allison," he apologised. "But it's all I can do to see anything of the road even now. I'm almost driving by memory as it is!"

"You're doing all right," I told him. "It's just the weather that's not on our side!" I lit two cigarettes and stuck one in his mouth. My watch said eight-thirty.

The last forty miles into Stowe took us four hours. It was nearly one in the morning when we stopped outside the pub. We went in and I led the

way to Vaseikov's room. I knocked three times without getting any answer, then I tried the door-handle. It wasn't locked.

The room was empty, the bed made and not touched. I didn't feel very bright when I realised that Vaseikov was still out. Townsend must have seen the look on my face. "Bad?" he asked, sympathetically.

"Not good," I said. I took him up to my room and we finished what remained of the bottle of Scotch. Then I took the Smith and Wesson out of the drawer and shoved it in my coat pocket.

"Going to trouble?" Townsend asked.

"Maybe," I said. "Does it worry you?"

"No," he grinned. "I was in a Cloak and Dagger Brigade during the war. It could be fun."

"No," I said soberly. "This isn't going to be fun!"

CHAPTER VI

Werewolf Comes To Life

I DROVE from the pub to the "Grange." I stopped the car at the entrance to the drive and we both got out. The warm feeling that I'd had from the Scotch, seemed to leave me suddenly. From somewhere up near the house came the awful howling. It seemed to re-echo through the fog.

"Hell!" Townsend muttered. "What's that!"

"You're idea of fun!" I told him. "Come on!" From somewhere along

the drive we heard a terrible scream that was suddenly choked off in the height of its intensity. I started to run, with Townsend easily keeping up beside me.

The light from the torch I was carrying only showed about two yards ahead through the swirling fog. The snow was beginning to melt, or had been during the day and the slush had frozen up again with the night frost. Two or three times I nearly went over

as my feet skidded on ice. From somewhere close in front of us I heard a noise.

We both stopped and listened. It was the sound of a woman sobbing. We started on again, walking. I kept one hand in my pocket with a firm hold on the gun. Then, through the shimmering whiteness we saw the woman who was sobbing. It was like a tableau of horror from a waxworks.

The body of Vaseikov, with the throat torn out, was lying stretched out on the frozen ground. Kneeling beside it, her coat covered with blood, was Mrs. Staynger, sobbing bitterly. She didn't even bother to look up at the light of the torch. We stood and looked at her and Townsend whispered something I didn't catch.

Running footsteps came from the house, and we could see a light bobbing in the distance, coming nearer. Seconds later, Clive Staynger and Danning appeared on the scene. They looked at us and then looked down at the figures on the ground. Danning said something to Clive, who took his mother gently by the shoulders and lifted her to her feet, and then started back to the house. She went with him easily enough, her sobbing had stopped and she looked dazed, as if she didn't know what was happening.

"You'd better come up to the house," Danning said to Townsend and me.

We followed him along the rest of the drive and into the small room where June had taken me the first time I visited the house. There was a fire burning in the grate, and Danning went over to the sideboard and poured out three generous glasses of brandy. I

thought that if my face looked anything like Townsend's I certainly needed the brandy. We lit cigarettes and five minutes later Clive came in, his face haggard. "She's sleeping now," he said. "I'll ring the police in a minute."

"Have this," Danning said quietly, and gave him a glass of brandy.

"We weren't sure," Clive said to me. "She's been—queer for a long time, but we couldn't believe that it had affected her in that way. It seemed fantastic that a middle-aged woman could kill a man in the way that Tom Bligh was killed. Not only a middle-aged woman," his voice broke and he turned away, "but she's also my mother!"

Danning patted him on the back and there was an awkward silence. "That chap, Vaseikov," Danning said to us, after a long pause, "called on us this evening and started talking about lycanthropy. It wasn't a pretty evening for any of us. When he explained it to us, we couldn't help but see how the thing applied to Mrs. Staynger. He left about half an hour ago and we naturally thought that Mrs. Staynger was asleep in her room."

He shuddered: "When all the time she must have been listening, and followed him when he left. God!" he bit his lip. "What a horrible thought!"

I lit another cigarette from the butt of the first. "She'll be tried," I said softly. "They'll find her guilty but insane, of course."

"Please." Danning motioned towards Clive. "Do you have to talk about it?"

"Under the terms of the will," I said thoughtfully. "Insanity will not neces-

sarily debar her from collecting her portion of the estate. But practically speaking, no one would allow her to control it, so I imagine that duty would pass to her ever-loving son!"

"What are you talking about?" Danning asked. I saw Townsend goggling at me.

"I must congratulate both you and Clive on your acting," I said.

"By the way," I grinned at Clive, who had spun round to look at me. "Where do you keep the Alsatian?"

He started towards me, but I whipped the Smith and Wesson out of my pocket and covered him and Danning. "Take it easy," I said. "Otherwise this cannon is liable to go off!"

They stopped where they were, looking at me with murder in their eyes. Townsend blinked twice, and I couldn't blame him, it must have been confusing, to say the least. "Call the police," I told him, "and ask for Inspector Wright and tell him to come out here straight away."

Something hard bored into the small of my back. "Drop it!" a cold voice said. I didn't have much option, I dropped the gun to the floor. Danning pounced on it and covered both me and Townsend.

"Nice work, June!" he said triumphantly. "I was worried for a moment!"

She moved round in front of me and looked at me for what seemed a long time. She was wearing a negligee over flimsy silk pyjamas, and if ever a woman looked desirable, she did.

"I thought you most attractive," she said slowly. "I thought you liked me, too. And all the time you were just snooping!"

She hit me across the face with the back of her hand. "You——!" she said. It wasn't a nice word to hear from a woman.

"They were asking about the dog," Clive said. "I think we might show them."

"Wait a minute, Clive," Danning muttered. "Don't you think . . ."

"Shut up!" June snarled at him. "Clive is right!"

They took us out of the back of the house and down to the garage that stood quite a distance away from the house. It had a heavy steel roller blind instead of a door. Clive operated a mechanism that lifted it and then we went inside. The blind shut behind us, and Clive pressed a switch, flooding the place with light.

It was empty except for something at the far end. There was an Alsatian dog chained to a staple in the wall. Its jaws were still covered with blood and it howled when it saw us and threw itself forward the length of the chain, straining to get at us.

"Pretty little fellow, isn't he?" Danning murmured. "It took six months of hard training to get him like he is!"

"Since you're so clever," June said to me, "you can be first!"

I guess I should have tried to be a hero, but with Clive having my gun stuck into the small of my back I didn't feel heroic. Something hit me hard across the nape of the neck and I fell to the ground. Clive hadn't hit me hard enough to knock me out, but he'd paralysed the nerve centre and I was helpless, I couldn't move. Danning had Townsend covered with June's gun.

June leant over me with a rag soak-

ed in something and swabbed it across my throat. Then she and Clive picked me up and started dragging me down towards where the Alsatian hurled itself against the drag of the chain in a frenzy of lust. I could smell the stuff she had put on my throat. It was the distinctive smell of raw meat, and it didn't need much imagination to know what was going to happen. They had trained the dog to react to that smell. To sink its fangs into the place where the odour came from.

I could feel the effects of the blow on my neck wearing off, but already they had me within a foot of the dog. June dropped my feet and Clive got me into a standing position and then pushed. I staggered forward and fell flat on my face.

I looked up to see the dog bounding towards me and I was rigid with fear. Its bloodstained jaws loomed over me and I closed my eyes. I heard a thud just in front of me and looked to see the dog in an inert heap on the floor with the haft of a knife sticking from its throat.

"Allison!" I heard Townsend yell, and then the sound of a shot. I got to my feet and started running towards them.

Townsend had Danning and was using him as a shield against the gun that June held. The gun Danning had had was on the floor about two yards away from them, and Clive was reaching for it. I took a flying leap and landed on his back, my hands round his throat. I heard another shot and a choking cry from Danning. Then I was astride Clive's back and I grabbed his ears in both hands and lifted his

head and smashed it down on the concrete floor. He went limp and I whipped the gun from the floor.

Danning was doubled up on the concrete and Townsend was backing away from June, away from the gun in her hand, with the smoke curling from it, as she slowly brought it up in line with his chest. There wasn't any choice in the matter. I fired twice and saw her drop the gun and slowly fall forward. I went over to her and turned her over on her back. There was still a look of surprise on her face, and the blood was pumping from her left breast. She died three seconds later.

I looked at Danning, who was clutching his stomach and moaning, and realised that June had shot him in cold blood so that she could get at Townsend. Clive was still out cold on the floor. "Where did that knife come from?" I asked Townsend.

He grinned sheepishly: "Remember I told you about the Cloak and Dagger Brigade? I got so used to carrying a knife strapped to my arm that I'd feel lost without it! I forgot about it until just before the dog jumped you!"

"I'm damn glad you remembered it then," I said. "Do you remember me saying something about ringing the police?"

Much later that morning we sat in the back room of the police station. Townsend, Inspector Wright, Sergeant Wilkes and myself.

"All right, master-mind," Wright grinned at me, "tell us your theories."

"It was the set-up of the will that first made everything clear," I told them. "You always have to find a mo-

tive, and there was one. One of the oldest in the world—greed!"

"Eliminate the other beneficiaries?" Wright said.

"Exactly," I agreed. "I imagine there must always have been some insanity in the family, that was why the will was framed that way. The old man wanted to make sure that the ones who inherited were sane. I think that Danning, who was June's fiancée, was talked into it by her and her brother. They told Logan that his aunt was going mad and asked him up here. He'd remember his mother and believe it.

"Once they got him up here, they could put their plan into action. After the first murder, they could appeal to him to protect his aunt and save the family name. They bought the Alsatian from Bligh about four months back and trained it to savage anything that smelled of raw meat. I think Bligh must have accidentally discovered that and that was why they killed him. They took the page out of his book where the sale of the dog was registered to Danning, as well. Then they told Logan that his aunt had been out of the house that night and she must have done it. Logan would believe it. I imagine they asked him to the house under the pretext of seeing the aunt, knocked him unconscious and gave him the same treatment as they were going to give me."

"Then at the right time they'd admit their aunt must have done it, and she'd be out of the way as well?" Wright said.

"That's it," I agreed. "That was why Logan was so desperate to make me keep out of it. He was scared I might uncover something. The night

before he died, he talked to Vaseikov about it."

"You think he told the doctor all about it?"

"No," I shook my head, "I think he probably quoted a hypothetical case. But the next night when I told Vaseikov about finding Logan's body and what I had seen through Mrs. Staynger's window, Vaseikov was shrewd enough to put two and two together and make six. But he over-estimated himself. They treated him in the same way as they did Logan."

"What started you thinking there was something more than a mad dog?" Wright asked.

"June," I said. "Harman in London sent me a telegram and I cursed him because it meant that gossip would identify me as a journalist. Immediately after that June said something about being flattered to know someone from 'Dynamite.' Now that wire had just been signed 'Harman.' There was no mention of the magazine at all. So she couldn't have found out about that from the post office. There was only one person in Stowe who knew that and could have told her, and that was Logan. Danning came to me with a cock and bull story about him being engaged to June so I'd better leave her alone. Everyone wanted me to have nothing to do with, firstly, the murder, and secondly, the Staynger family. I started wondering if the two were connected."

"How do you explain Mrs. Staynger being beside Vaseikov's body?" Wright asked.

"I imagine they played on her brain, suggesting to her that she ac-

ually was a lycanthrope," I said. "And to get her out there beside the body and persuade her she did it, was just another link in the chain!"

Wright struck a match to his pipe and grinned. "I've just come back from the hospital," he said. "Danning is dying and he made a full confession. You're quite right," his face sobered. "A more diabolical thing I've never heard! They played tricks on the poor woman, convincing her that she really did act like a mad dog or a wolf. They had the dog outside her window, howling, night after night. When she asked them, they said they heard the dog, but no one within miles owned one. They smeared the blood on her clothes and talked about lycanthropy incessantly. They even told her that her sister was one."

"That's all I wanted to know," I said. "That completes the story, and my feature. Will you do me a favour, Inspector? Keep the details from the Press until Clive Staynger's trial?"

"You want an exclusive, eh?" he grinned. "All right, I think you've earned it!"

I was glad of that. The story was

already on its way to the States, and I'd been sweating blood that Wright would play ball.

"How is Mrs. Staynger now?" I asked him.

"She's been taken to a nursing home," he said. "But the doctors don't give her much of a chance. The strain of last night on top of everything else has proved too much. Her heart is failing rapidly."

"If she dies, there'll be no one left to inherit the estate," I said. "Who gets it all in that case?"

"The Rothersea Dogs' Home," Wright said quietly.

"Dynamite" hit the bookstalls a week early, the next edition. It sold out in two days. The editor said a nice couple of paragraphs in a letter to me and enclosed a bonus cheque.

The only thing I really enjoyed in Stowe was my night out with Alice. We went to the "Regal" in Searbourne and sat in the back row. Then I saw her home. And that's all you're going to find out about it. But I will say this, for fine old English hospitality, Alice was hard to beat.

THE END

Note: All characters and incidents in this story are imaginary, and if any name used be that of living person, such use is due to inadvertence, and is not intended to refer to such person.

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